

Creating a Statewide Recovery Network and Growing your Grassroots Groups



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Self-Help Groups: Are they Effective?

- Self-help groups are increasingly being recognized as viable, efficient methods of supplementing and extending the present health and mental health care system to the point of being characterized as an "emerging social movement" (Borkman, 1990; Katz, 1981).



- Recent research conservatively estimates that 10 million Americans are currently using self-help groups, and that as many as 25 million have been involved in a group sometime in their life (Kessler, Mickelson, & Zhao, 1997)



- Numerous research studies have concluded that self-help groups are effective in helping group members, both short term and long term.
- Self-help groups have been shown to improve health conditions and prevent problems associated with chronic illness.



Definition of Self-help

- Self-help groups are voluntary, small group structures for mutual aid and the accomplishment of a special purpose.
- They are usually formed by peers who have come together for mutual assistance in satisfying a common need, overcoming a common handicap or life-disrupting problem and bringing about desired social and/or personal change.



Key Components

- Voluntary
- Small group structures
- For mutual assistance & accomplishment of special purposes
- Usually formed by peers
- For satisfying a common need, overcoming a handicap or life-disrupting problem



Key Components continued

- For bringing about social and/or personal change
- Emphasizes face-to-face interactions
- Assumes personal responsibility by the members
- May provide material assistance along with emotional support
- Frequently "cause" oriented & driven by an ideology



Why Self-Help Works

- **Instant Identity**
- **Empowerment**
- **Mutual Self-Disclosure**
- **Helper-Therapy Principle - mutuality and reciprocity**
- **Social Role Models - role modeling, vicarious learning**



Why Self-Help Works continued

- **Normalizing Effect**
- **Networking**
- **Information - practical coping, latest information, etc.**
- **Ideology**



Instant Identity

- Someone knows how you feel, you're not alone
- A special empathy different from professionals



Empowerment

- Based on notion that there is "strength in numbers"
- Encourages people to be responsible & take control



Mutual Self-Disclosure

- A safe place to disclose, to be forgiven, to obtain redirection
- Accountability



Helper-Therapy Principle - mutuality and reciprocity

- Helping is therapeutic - the person who is helping is helped the most
- Increases competence & self-esteem
- Creates equality between members



Social Role Models - role modeling, vicarious learning

- Provides examples of someone who is coping, changing, making it
- Opportunities for vicarious learning



Normalizing Effect

- Helps members view their experience as normal processes - "I'm not crazy"
- Combats tendency to feel stigmatized



Networking

- Helps to embed persons in a network of caring relationships
- Immediate access, no appointment; help beyond regular meeting times
- Role other than "patient" when interacting with professionals & decision makers



Information - practical coping, latest information, etc.

- Centers of information - practical, educational & scientific
- Serve to redefine the term "expert" because of their experiences - the "experiential expert"



Ideology

- Help provide a world view of self & their problem
- Provides a viewpoint and sometimes a program for overcoming some problem or situation



Keeping a Support Group Going

- Remember to share
- Remember to be realistic
- Remember that groups develop in stages
- Remember to Assess and Reassess
- Remember what support groups do best



REMEMBER TO SHARE

- **Although this sounds like advice a parent might** give their child, it is also good advice for support groups. The concept of sharing is central to the development of a successful support group. Sharing helps produce a cohesive group. It produces ownership in the group. It sets the tone and establishes an atmosphere of openness and togetherness.



REMEMBER TO BE REALISTIC

- **The group will not always be "successful" in its activities or** with the people that come into it. Don't traumatize yourself or others with unnecessary accusations and charges. Although self-help groups are effective for many, they are not a cure-all. Avoid idealizing the group. Also, be realistic about members who eventually decide to leave the group.



Groups develop in stages

- ***Forming - This begins when people try to find others who share their problem/concern.***
- ***Norming - The group begins to consider developing relationships with other groups or***
- ***Storming - Some might call this the teen-age phase of a group. Disagreements about***
- ***Performing - This represents the stage when the group finally gets down to business.***



Forming

- ***This begins when people try to find others who share their problem/concern.***
- Meetings are characterized by no set behavioral patterns and discussions are not too open.



Norming

- ***The group begins to consider developing relationships with other groups or*** helpers in the community. Meeting routines begin to develop. Discussion is becoming more open. Friendships begin to develop. Members begin to agree about the purpose of the group and what activities are needed to carry it out. Expectations about appropriate group behavior develop.



Storming

- ***Some might call this the teen-age phase of a group. Disagreements about*** purpose, group activities, and expectations appear. It is a period of questioning.



Performing

- ***This represents the stage when the group finally gets down to business.*** Roles for members are set and usually happen without anyone having to orchestrate it. Expectations are clear. The purpose and activities of the group have been accepted. Greater trust has developed and discussions become more open. The group is not free from disagreements, but they tend to be less severe.



REMEMBER TO ASSESS AND REASSESS

- **REMEMBER TO ASSESS AND REASSESS** - Given the on-going developmental nature of support groups and the fact that some problems will normally arise, groups need to become more intentional in evaluating their goals and practices. Groups might set aside specific times to do this. Using typical problem-solving strategies, group members could become actively involved in assessing the effectiveness of their group.



REMEMBER WHAT SUPPORT GROUPS DO BEST

- **Remember support is your area of expertise.** Research shows that one of the most consistent drawing factors of self-help and mutual support groups is the emotional support and sense of community they provide.



Principles for Organizing

- Go where the energy is
- Reach out to people
- Choose a good location
- Start and end on time



Tips for Recruiting

- Place notices on key posting areas: churches, schools, organizations, clubs, shops, hospitals, nursing homes, community bulletin boards, libraries, and post offices.
- Print up and distribute one page flyers on your self-help group.
- Design a brochure that explains group's purpose, activities, services, etc.



Tips for Recruiting continued

- Establish a Speakers' Bureau and make presentations before appropriate groups: church, community, civic, private, business.
- Speak to clergymen, doctors, administrators, agency directors, social workers, media personnel, nurses, (anyone who might be sympathetic to your need.)



Tips for Recruiting continued

- If health related, contact your local hospital: social services department and community health education department.
- Talk to persons who have started self-help groups and ask what methods they use in recruiting group members.



Tips for Recruiting continued

- Talk to public relations people at local industries and businesses about getting ads in their periodicals or newsletters.
- Contact local offices, associations and foundations that address your area of concern, for example, office on aging, handicapped, Cancer Society, mental health association, etc.



Tips for Recruiting continued

- Call your local information and referral helpline/hotline - make sure they know of your group's existence.
- Determine which agencies/organizations print community or social service directories; contact them and request your group be included.
- Write a brief notice and ask that it be placed in church bulletins/newsletters.



Tips for Recruiting continued

- Write a "letter-to-the-editor" explaining the group's purpose (it is especially likely to be printed if you comment in response to a current article or editorial.)
- Write a brief radio spot and send it to local radio stations requesting they air it as a public service announcement.
- Form a professional advisory committee, invite key resource persons to serve, and enlist their ideas and help in publicizing the group.



Locating a meeting space

- Churches and synagogues
- Your local YMCA/YWCA also provides meeting space for self-help groups.
- Community organizations or agencies such as Community Mental Health Centers, Red Cross, Salvation Army, Rotary, Lions, Kiwanis, or Senior Citizens



Other possible meeting sites

- **Your local library, bank, municipal town hall, or community college**
- **Hospitals are another option, especially if your group is health related.**



Publicizing Your Group

- There are two basic methods for getting your message to the media: the press release and the public service announcement (PSA). Editors decide at a glance which press releases will be used so it is important that they be written well and in the correct form.
- Keep in mind that press releases and PSA's are only effective when they contain information of genuine significance to the public.



Rules for fund-raising success

- People give to people. Ask in person.
- The best people to ask for money are people who have already given money. Keep records of your donors.
- People cannot respond unless you tell them what you want. Always ask for a specific amount or item...



- People who ask for money become better givers. People who give money become better askers.
- People want to back a winner. Be proud of your organization, what you do, and how you do it.
- More people means more money and more fun.. Find a job for every volunteer.
- People want recognition. Send thank-you notes.



Developing a phone network

- A telephone is probably one of a group's most important resources. It links members with each other, providing ongoing support and information. Many groups develop special phone networks to provide a means of contacting members and maintaining group momentum between meetings. Phone networks can provide a central resource for persons seeking information about the group.



Building Share Leadership

- Think shared leadership from the outset
- Rotate leadership and other tasks
- Meet in power neutral place
- Vary meeting times
- Adjust seating to facilitate sharing
- Integrate new members



Shared Leadership

- While the group is still in its earliest stages of formation, set the precedent of sharing tasks and resources, so that at the very least there are two people taking responsibility for what has to get done, and no one person does it all. In the short run it may seem easier to do things completely by yourself, but such a pattern is very easily set and quite hard to break: you then become the expert, and the "best person to do it" at the cost of mutual aid and joint ownership.



Rotate Leadership

- Once the group is up and meeting, change in a planned way (i.e. weekly, monthly, quarterly, or annually) the person who runs meetings, arranges speakers, sets up refreshments, etc. In the Twelve Traditions of A.A., it is stated that "anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities." One way that the Anonymous groups have operationalized this is by having not just one group leader, but many, with a regular weekly change in who fulfills this group function.



Neutral Space

- Physical environments play a major role in how comfortable or secure people feel both from an aesthetic standpoint as well as from the standpoint of political and territorial dynamics. Always meeting in one particular person's home, for example, may "stack the deck" against certain group members taking leadership roles, based on their relationships with the host or hostess. Consequently, it's a good idea to rotate among different people's homes.



Vary meeting times

- While regularity of time (and place) is obviously helpful in developing group stability, there are some people who may systematically be excluded from attendance if the group only meets, say, on Tuesday evenings, Saturday mornings, or the third Wednesday of every month. Therefore it may be a good idea to have at least the first few meetings at different times during the week, so that as many interested people as possible can have a chance to attend.



Adjust seating to facilitate sharing

- When the seating arrangement is such that people are in rows facing the front of a room, where group leaders sit with everyone facing only them, the group's tendency is to deal only through the leader(s), rather than through a mutual exchange process. Less dependence on a leader will develop when all group members face each other in a circle or around a table.



Integrate New Members

- In addition to verbally welcoming new people to the group, try to be aware of how the group is experienced by a newcomer and seat yourselves accordingly: distribute old-timers among the newer or less-known group members rather than clustering among yourselves. Similarly, share the history and knowledge of the group.



- Questions or Comments?